

sight in his country, who has been invited to the White House by President Trump?

Well, our country has got to stand up for what is great about our country: our Constitution and our Bill of Rights. President Trump said this is a witch hunt. But I want to close by telling you about a real witch hunt that is going on right now on the planet Earth.

And if we were not so distracted by the spreading staph infection in the White House, we would be able to help in terms of this situation. And I refer to you an article that was in the newspaper a couple of days ago in *The New York Times* about the governor of Jakarta, one of the largest cities in Indonesia.

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He is Christian. He is the Governor of Jakarta. Someone was running against him and said that all the Muslims should vote against him because he is Christian. They should have to vote for a Muslim because the Koran tells them to. The governor objected.

Mr. Basuki said: That is not right. The Koran doesn't say that Muslims must vote for Muslims. Muslims can vote for me, even though I am a Christian.

He was prosecuted, arrested for blasphemy against the Koran, against Islam, and sentenced to 2 years hard time in a maximum security prison in Indonesia.

In America, where we have a First Amendment and freedom of conscience, free exercise of religion, separation of church and State, we got rid of blasphemy a long time ago. But now we have got a human being—a governor, no less—who is in prison for hard time in Indonesia, one of our allies. We should not let that stand.

There are hundreds of people all over the Earth who are in prison for blasphemy or apostasy or heresy—religious offenses—and we are saying nothing about it. In Russia itself, there were just marches a month ago against political corruption and authoritarianism. Tens of thousands of people. Our government did nothing. Why? Some of them are on the payroll of Russian autocrats, and others just don't care.

We should be on the side of the people of Russia who are fighting for democracy, fighting for religious freedom, fighting for human rights. That is what America should be about. That is what is really at stake here.

Our government should not be consumed with self-interest and promoting people's corporate agendas. It should not be consumed with the personal vanity of the President. It should not be about private agendas. It should be about the public good of the American people and standing with democracies all over the Earth.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS: DIRECTOR COMEY FIRING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. JAYAPAL) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE). She has been such a champion on progressive issues for so long. BARBARA LEE still speaks for me across the country.

Ms. LEE. Let me thank Congresswoman JAYAPAL for yielding and for holding this important issue on this existential threat to our democracy. Also, I just have to say that she has just hit the ground running here on behalf of the American people, on behalf of working men and women, on behalf of peace and security in the world, on behalf of our democracy. So I thank her for her leadership.

The constant stream of allegations and scandals springing from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is really quite shocking. I have to admit that, after watching President Trump fire the FBI Director who was investigating him, I thought things could not get any worse. But just days later, President Trump blundered into sharing classified intelligence with Russian officials.

As the Nation and the world grappled with the aftermath of this revelation, yet more shocking news was breaking. The *New York Times* has alleged that, before he was fired, Director Comey was pressured by President Trump to shut down an ongoing investigation into General Michael Flynn's possible collusion with the Russians.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear with the American people. If *The New York Times* report is true, President Trump's attempts to influence a Federal probe can only be described in one way, and that is obstruction of justice. And, yes, we all know obstruction of justice is an impeachable offense.

Right now, one thing, though, is crystal clear: The President's abuse of power has plunged this Nation into a full-blown constitutional crisis. This crisis goes far beyond party interests. Every American, Democrat or Republican, should be concerned by these allegations.

President Trump's actions have threatened national security, the rule of law, and the independence of our Nation's justice system. His actions dishonor the Office of the Presidency and place this Nation and our allies in danger.

The reports of last week underscore the need to establish a bipartisan, independent commission to get to the bottom of Russian interference in our elections once and for all. It is vitally important that Director Mueller—and I am very pleased that the Department of Justice appointed him; this is one step in the right direction—be given the resources and the autonomy to conduct an investigation.

Unfortunately, President Trump said that this investigation is a witch hunt. Nothing could be further from the truth. The American people deserve to know the facts about possible collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign. Our democracy must be defended at all costs.

I thank Congresswoman JAYAPAL for giving us a chance to speak tonight about this very dangerous moment that we are in, about Presidential abuse, and, really, about the preservation of our democracy. The Congressional Progressive Caucus continues to lead on so many issues that are important to this country and to the world.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Mr. Speaker, it is my great honor to yield to the distinguished gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY), who has also been a leader in the Progressive Caucus on so many issues, from the death penalty to immigration to healthcare.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Congresswoman JAYAPAL and the Congressional Progressive Caucus for convening this 1-hour discussion about our democracy at risk.

I don't think it is really an exaggeration that what we are seeing right now is our democracy actually under attack. Unfortunately, it is from our own White House.

I think Americans around the country, regardless of their political party or even political persuasion, are kind of shaking their head and saying: What the heck is going on?

Every day, there is some sort of a new and disturbing revelation. We found out that the President of the United States just seems to have blurted out highly, highly classified information in a meeting with the Russian Ambassador and the Russian Foreign Minister—information that was passed on, it seems, from the Israelis, but actually could put some of the people who are doing the most delicate work on the ground in some danger. And then, of course, last week, the President fired the FBI Director, James Comey.

As a Democrat, I certainly have had problems in the past with James Comey. I think that he helped influence the outcome of the election. But it turns out that on national television the President basically admitted, after giving various explanations of the firing, that it came down to the Russian investigation.

Then we find out that James Comey actually took notes of a meeting with the President where the President asked him to drop the investigation of General Flynn and his connection to the Russians. It is a real question of what is going on.

It was an important step when, yesterday, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein took the important first step of appointing a special counsel to investigate the Russia connection and the relationship between this administration of President Trump and the Russians.

I am really happy. I was on the Intelligence Committee when Robert Mueller was the FBI Director. I have to tell you that I feel very confident in his independence and his integrity. I know that he, importantly, would not allow the FBI to work with the CIA when they wanted to torture people, essentially, by using enhanced interrogation techniques. So I feel good that he is a very good choice.

But having done that, today I was happy to sign a discharge petition to create an independent commission that would also be looking into even the larger picture about what was going on with the Russian influence campaign involving itself in our elections, and then also, what was the connection between the Trump administration, Donald Trump himself, did they collude on influencing the election?

It is important to do both. They are complementary. They don't do the same thing.

I am going to quote from ADAM SCHIFF, who is our ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee. I think he put it really well: "The value an independent commission adds is you have a body that is truly independent of any political consideration and also has all the resources it needs and a single focus on the oversight of what Russia did, how we need to respond in the future, and it brings that political independence and staff and resources on task. So those are two different needs, and I think they're complementary, not in competition with each other."

The other reason I am very much in support not only of the special prosecutor, but of the independent commission is because, then, Congress has a role here. Congress itself is saying—hopefully, Republicans and Democrats. We have two Republicans right now on our discharge petition that would force the bill to come to the floor that would say that we, together, think that this is worthy, our democracy is worthy of this kind of in-depth investigation.

Finally, let me say we would find out a lot about the relationship of the President and Russia, plus other conflicts of interest, if we could see his tax returns, like every other President has done. Release his tax returns.

Again, I would hope that this has not devolved into strictly a partisan issue. All Americans should say: Let us look at those ties the President may have in countries around the world or with companies at home.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Again, I am very pleased as the Congressional Progressive Caucus to be able host a Special Order every week. We pick a different topic every week, for those of you that are just beginning to listen. This week we want to focus attention on what we believe are some of the most serious and pressing issues facing our country today around the Trump administration's ties to Russia, around the firing of James Comey, and the many, many issues that have come forward over the

last several months, but certainly in the last week.

Since last Tuesday, we have borne witness to a slew of alarming events within the White House and the Department of Justice. Last Tuesday afternoon, we received word that the President had fired FBI Director James Comey from his position.

That position, by the way, is a 10-year term. Congress designated it as a 10-year term specifically to ensure that we could protect any administration and the entire country against any conflict of interest that may come up. Obviously, that did not convince the President that he should keep Director Comey.

So we heard that he fired him. It seems as if each morning we wake up to a barrage of firings, tweets, or untruths that continue to erode the public's confidence in our democracy.

So what do we know today? Certainly, we don't know enough, but we do know that the President fired Director Comey under the guise of being unsatisfied with how he handled Secretary Hillary Clinton's email investigation.

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But if that were the case, then why didn't he fire him months ago? Why now? Why did he choose to meet with Russian officials the day after firing Mr. Comey?

Mr. Trump's attempts to use Clinton's emails to divert attention from Comey's investigation into the campaign's ties to Russia are, unfortunately, very disingenuous, and I think that they are proving to be unsuccessful.

Despite his claims that Mr. Comey was not investigating him, the President must have been concerned about what Director Comey would find because the firing, interestingly, came just days after Director Comey had requested additional resources for the investigation.

White House officials attempted at first to say that the blame for the firing was Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein's fault. They said it was at his recommendation. Attorney General Jeff Sessions weighed in on that decision as well. But, in fact, shortly after, the President went on television and said that, no, this was his decision regardless of what had been proposed, this is where he was going to be.

On Wednesday, just 1 day after firing then-Director Comey, the President welcomed the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov; and the Russian Ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, into the Oval Office for a closed press meeting. Let's not forget that Kislyak met with former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn during the campaign, a meeting that Flynn then lied about. I think this is very important because there were a number of Trump administration or Trump campaign officials that met with Russian officials over the course of many months before the election.

Those meetings in and of themselves are not a problem. The problem, however, is that these individuals continued to lie about those meetings, and that makes you wonder: What fire is there where the smoke is? Why would they lie about these things?

We certainly don't know that. We have been unable to get the transcripts of that conversation because the President has not been willing to release them.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is more willing to make that information public than our own President, but I find it outrageous that President Putin would actually propose to be sort of the backup of this information for the President. We are not looking to President Putin to provide corroboration of these meetings. We actually need an independent ability to look at the facts of this case.

On Monday, the news exploded with reports that the President released highly classified information to Lavrov and Kislyak during their discussion at the White House. This is extremely alarming. It is true that the President has the right to declassify any information, but the information that was shared was so sensitive that the United States had not even shared it with our allies. The President's decision to divulge that information to foreign officials—particularly Russian officials with whom our relationship is contentious at best—is dangerous and reckless.

There is no doubt in my mind that this will hinder our ability to build international coalitions to actually be able to share information with allies who provide that classified information to us with the understanding that we are going to protect that and guard that. Should any classified information then be declassified for some reason, it is done in consultation with the country that provided that information and with national security advisors. None of that happened in this situation.

President Trump also tweeted during the campaign that Hillary Clinton and her team were extremely careless in their handling of very sensitive and highly classified information. So this seems like a particular irony. The President claimed that Hillary Clinton's lack of ability to handle classified information actually made her unfit to be President.

Speaker PAUL RYAN said this: "It is simple: Individuals who are 'extremely careless' with classified information should be denied further access to it." Reince Priebus, Trump's Chief of Staff, took it one step further, saying: "Those who mishandled classified info have had their sec clearances revoked, lost their jobs, faced fines, and even been sent to prison."

So this is a situation that we have to take extremely seriously.

Before we could even fully engage and vet that news, however, reports then came out that President Trump had actually asked FBI Director James

Comey to drop the investigation into Michael Flynn. According to sources close to Comey, this request came just 1 day after Michael Flynn was fired. This is truly a new low. If this is true—and we are trying to get to the bottom of this—it would absolutely constitute an obstruction of justice. The President has put obstacle after obstacle in the way of any real investigation that gives us the information that we need to protect our national security and the American people.

In the 118 days since the Trump Presidency began, it has been scandal after scandal. The latest events have escalated this crisis to an even higher level. As I mentioned, the FBI Director serves a 10-year term specifically in order to be able to carry out these independent investigations free of partisanship or political pressure. The firing of James Comey and the fact that he was asked by the President for loyalty—again, this is apparently in Director Comey's memo, which we hope to be able to see—and to abandon the investigation against Michael Flynn are extremely serious offenses. They hurt our democracy and they hurt our country.

The President has tried to distract us time and time again, but we actually know that the American people deserve better. History smiles kindly on those who stand up and put country over party and on those who ensure that in the darkest of times and the most difficult of times, the times when we face a constitutional crisis, where our Nation wonders what direction we are going in, the times when we know that the need to preserve the institutions of democracy and justice are most necessary, those are the times when we need people to speak out on both sides of the aisle for the facts, for the truth, and for democracy.

This should not be a partisan issue. We are seeing that starting to emerge from our colleagues across the aisle. I commend those Republicans who have begun to ask for information, documents, and hearings; and I hope that more of my colleagues will join us in the pursuit of truth and in the pursuit of justice.

Last night we received news that Robert Mueller, who is the former FBI Director, has been appointed as special counsel for the investigation into the Trump campaign's ties with Russia. This is an extremely distinguished man. He has served the country with tremendous success and loyalty, and we are hopeful that Mr. Mueller will diligently investigate the allegations against Michael Flynn and other members of the Trump campaign with veracity and free from political influence. However, we still maintain that an independent commission is necessary because a special counsel answers to the Attorney General, who can then overrule decisions that they make or even fire them at any time. So the appointment of Robert Mueller is a good first step, but it cannot be the last.

Director Mueller will still be in the chain of command under the Trump-appointed leadership of the Justice Department. He cannot take the place of a truly independent outside commission that is free from Trump's meddling.

I think that is why it is so important that we all join in signing the discharge petition that was introduced yesterday by my colleagues, Representative SWALWELL and Representative CUMMINGS, who is the ranking member on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. This discharge petition would essentially allow for a bill to move forward that would establish an independent commission that we could truly trust to seek justice. The commission would interview witnesses, would obtain documents, would issue subpoenas, and would receive public testimony in order to examine whether or not the Russian Government did, in fact, interfere with U.S. elections and how they carried that out.

This is a really crucial step to take because it is not only about the short term and the immediacy of what is in front of us—extremely important, the commission would deal with that as well—but it is also about how do we ensure that these things don't happen again? What did happen, first of all, and how do we make sure that we continue to protect our democracy in the face of what 17 independent intelligence agencies said, which is that the Russians hacked our election in the United States?

There is a lot we need to understand. We need the special counsel, but we also need this independent citizen commission not made up of Members of Congress, but appointed by the House and the Senate leaders of both parties in equal numbers so that we could actually have people who look at this from the perspective of all of America and not tainted by even the vestiges or the appearance of party.

Apparently when President Trump heard that special counsel had been named, he laughed out loud, saying that this is "the greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history."

No, Mr. President, we are seeking the truth. As the American people have shown us, they are not backing down, and we will continue to fight for this truth.

Now, in that vein, I also wanted to mention that my colleague, Representative RASKIN, and I actually introduced a package of bills that we are calling the Trump transparency package. It is because we really believe that the American people deserve better. We believe that the American people deserve from us transparency. So what this package will do is, first, it will clearly forbid government officials from accepting anything of value from foreign governments in exchange for an official act. It would prohibit government employees from using their positions to further the financial interests of the President. It would ensure that the

President's press pool continues to exist so that the American people receive honest answers, and it would require the President and his family to publicly report any foreign business deals that exceed \$10,000.

These are simple steps. They are not egregious and they are not outrageous. They would apply to anyone. They are not partisan. They are about transparency and accountability so that we know that the President of the United States and that others in government are actually accountable to the American people—not to their financial interests, not to their bank accounts, not to their stock portfolios, not to their hotels and golf courses, but to the American people. We have to hold every administration—and certainly this one—accountable. So now, more than ever, it is our moral duty to defend the Constitution, and this bill package goes a step in the right direction.

So I hope that all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle would actually cosponsor the Trump transparency package with us so that we can continue to fight for the American people, for democracy, and for the notion that America is willing to question itself and for the notion that America is willing to always put our hands on that moral arc of the universe to push it more quickly towards justice.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. CHENEY). Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President and are further reminded to address their remarks to the Chair.

AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for 30 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, first, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, I rise today, along with my colleagues, to talk about restoring Congress' constitutional oversight on matters of war and peace. I invite all of my colleagues to join me in demanding that this House immediately repeal the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force.

Nearly 16 years ago, Congress passed an open-ended, blank check for endless war. This authorization gives any President the authority to wage limitless war at any time, anywhere, for any reason in perpetuity. The vote to relinquish our constitutional authority occurred just 3 days after the horrific terrorist attacks on 9/11. The American